

Nigeria: Community health centres distribute nets to pregnant women

Malaria Consortium's Senior Technical Malaria Officer, Osita Okonkwo, interviews Fatima Abdulwahab from Wuse District, near Abuja, to hear her views on using mosquito nets.

The true value of long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) can only be understood through the invaluable accounts of consistent users in rural communities, such as Fatima.

Fatima Abdulwahab is a 27 year old mother of three children whom she describes as her 'precious gifts'. Her husband is a factory worker, Musa, who earns barely enough to sustain the family. Fatima herself has no formal education and looks after her family. Musa and Fatima previously lived for many years in the northern Nigerian city of Kano. Four years ago Fatima relocated with her children to Wuse District, northwest Abuja, to live with her husband's parents, although Musa still lives and works in Kano.

Fatima's only sickness since childhood had been malaria, caused by bites from infected mosquitoes. She was hospitalised several times during her first pregnancy and treated for malaria, during which time she almost lost her life. She recalls how one of her husband's sisters, a mother of five young children, died of malaria during pregnancy a few years back. Her death, she said, was a



Fatima Abdulwahab, visits the health centre in Wuse where she had received a free mosquito net during her pregnancy



Mothers wait with their new babies to see the doctor at the Wuse health centre

turning point in the lives of the family and prompted her husband and some other family members to save money to procure mosquito nets. Although the nets were of low quality, they worked and helped to reduce cases of malaria in the family.

In 2010, Fatima's nearest health centre in Wuse started free distribution of LLINs for pregnant women. Fatima was among one of the first groups of pregnant women to receive nets from the facility. She said that now she and her children all sleep under mosquito nets, they no longer have malaria. Fatima also made sure that all the pregnant women she knew in her village visited the health centre to receive free nets as well.

"Since we started using the nets, my children and I don't get malaria again. The net is very, very good; it is saving our lives. We sleep under the nets day and night. I cannot sleep without my net. Even when the weather is hot, I must sleep under the net."

Fatima's story echoes that of several other women whose lives have been changed by the use of LLINs. All can talk about the benefits of being able to receive and use nets. Their stories demonstrate what can be achieved through sustained net distributions to poor households in rural communities.